

## Enriching Group Communication through Applied Improvisation and Meditation

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The ability to mindfully listen to others and oneself fosters the healthiest environment for group discussion. This study explores how applied improvisation and meditation might enhance group communication. Applied improvisation is the use of principles and practices of improvisation in non-theatrical settings. One of the many benefits of applied improvisation is that it teaches students how to fully listen to what others are saying. Meditation is the practice of consciously turning inwards and focusing the thoughts for reflective purposes. Meditation teaches students mindfulness and the ability to listen to their inner monologue. Together applied improvisation and meditation builds community, encourages risk taking, removes judgment of self and others, and promotes acceptance through its joint focus on holistic listening. These concepts will be applied to group discussions/reflections occurring on an educationally-meaningful service trip (alternative spring break) to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago during spring 2015. This is preliminary research using a mixed methods design. First, self-rating questionnaires will be given to the participants. As a participant observer, I will record notes immediately after each reflection session. Finally, qualitative interviews will be conducted the week immediately following the trip with a former trip leader and former trip participants who were also on this specific trip. Mixed methods, or pragmatic research, allows for both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered in a complementary way. The results will be gathered at the conclusion of the spring break trip. Our anticipated results are that the quality of the group discussion will be enhanced for a safer and more enriching learning environment for participants. If so, these methods can be refined and applied in future service-learning experiences.

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